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SUBJECT: DEFENSE TEAM IN TAJIKISTAN TO LOOK AT PROCUREMENT  
POSSIBILITIES FOR U.S. TROOPS IN AFGHANISTAN

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11. (SBU) Summary: A team of U.S. military purchasing specialists visited Tajikistan last week to investigate possibilities for procuring non-lethal goods on the Tajik market for delivery to U.S. troops in Afghanistan. The team tentatively agreed to purchase bottled water from Tajik manufacturer Obi Zulol, pending quality assessments. They also explored the potential for purchasing other food and beverage products, including dairy, juice, nuts, and other snack foods, as well as non-food items such as textiles and paper products. The team met with Tajik government officials to express CENTCOM's interest in local procurement, explain the U.S. military's quality control standards, and ensure the cooperation of key government agencies such as Customs, Border Guards, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. All assured the U.S. team that they would do everything necessary to make sure that supplies flow efficiently to Afghanistan. This being Tajikistan, however, such talk is cheap; the real proof will come when and if deliveries begin. End summary.

TEAM LOOKS AT TAJIK WATER AND OTHER GOODS

12. (SBU) Following up on a commitment by General David Petraeus during his October visit to Dushanbe to promote local procurement of non-lethal goods for U.S. troops in Afghanistan, a team of nine military purchasing specialists led by Commander Stephen J. Kaufman of CENTCOM's Logistics Directorate visited Tajikistan last week. The team included civilian representatives from government and private sector military contractors, as well as food safety and public health specialists from the U.S. Army's Veterinary Command (VETCOM). Lawrence Coleman, with the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA), and Mitch Juby, a senior buyer with DLA contractor Supreme Global Service Solutions, were on hand to look at food and beverage products. Douglas French, Director of the Distribution Operations Division of the General Services Administration's Federal Acquisition Service, came to look at local procurement possibilities for paper products. Steve Zolock, Director of Program Management for Technology Management Company, was looking at textiles and building materials. The four VETCOM specialists were Jeffrey LaHuis, Jeffrey Lyons, Eric Newsome, and Don Shuttleworth.

13. (SBU) On November 18, Supreme buyer Mitch Juby and three of the VETCOM specialists visited the headquarters of Tajikistan's largest beverage company, Obi Zulol, to conduct a site visit and collect samples for testing. Obi Zulol produces mineral water, soda, and, more recently, fruit juices. Should the samples pass the military's quality control specifications, Supreme will enter into contract negotiations with the company to supply bottled water to U.S. troops in Afghanistan. Obi Zulol previously had a contract to provide water to troops in 2006, but the contract was not renewed due to difficulties with

transit to and over Afghan territory. With the creation of the Northern Distribution Network, efforts are being made to ensure that such difficulties do not re-emerge.

14. (SBU) In addition to inspecting Obi Zulol, the CENTCOM-led team was in Tajikistan to explore other procurement possibilities in Tajikistan. On November 16, team members visited a dairy production facility, a textile factory, a paper products packager, and a nut distributor. According to the participants, all of the facilities showed potential promise as suppliers to U.S. troops in Afghanistan. The team explained to Tajik representatives, however, that the military has specific contracting needs and procedures as well as exacting quality control specifications, so it would be some time before decisions were made on contracting.

#### ENSURING GOVERNMENT BUY-IN

15. (SBU) On November 17, Kaufman, Coleman, Zolock, and French, accompanied by Embassy Econoff and Commercial Specialist, met with officials from Tajikistan's Customs Committee, Border Guards, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, and Chamber of Commerce, to explain their mission, discuss contracting procedures, and ensure buy-in from key officials.

16. (SBU) Customs Committee First Deputy Chairman Negmat Rahmatov assured team members that procedures for exporting goods from Tajikistan were relatively liberal. He said that by law Customs officials had 48 hours from the delivery of invoices to clear outgoing freight. As a matter of course, however, clearance often took as little as "15 or 20 minutes." Processing fees ranged from \$10 for goods valued between \$0 and \$5,000 to \$900 for goods valued at over \$1 million. Rahmatov explained that according to intergovernmental agreements, loaded Tajik trucks were permitted to travel to their destinations in Afghanistan,

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and vice-versa. He was not sure that Tajik freight forwarders would drive all the way to Kabul, but a representative from Obi Zulol said shippers are willing to do this. The other option is to use Afghan transport, but empty Afghan trucks were not permitted to travel further north than Qurghonteppa, 100 km from the Afghan border. (Empty Tajik trucks could not proceed further south than Kunduz in Afghanistan.) Rahmatov said the Afghans officially charged \$200 for laden trucks to proceed through Afghanistan but indicated that other unofficial payments were sometimes demanded. The U.S.-built bridge at Nizhniy Pyanj can accommodate 1,000 trucks a day, but current traffic averages only 200 a day. Customs hours are from 0800 to 1800, seven days a week, although Rahmatov said the Afghan side closes on Friday and "sometimes at other times for reasons we don't understand." General Mirzoev of the Tajik Border Guards told the team that his troops only interfered with freight transit if they had actionable intelligence that a shipment contained contraband. Otherwise it is the responsibility of Customs to deal with freight shipments.

17. (SBU) Farhod Salim, the Head of the Department of American and European Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, assured the contracting team that they had the support not only of his minister but of President Rahmon. He said the relationship with Afghanistan was one of the most important for Tajikistan, noting that the Minister had recently canceled a trip to the Czech Republic in order to attend the inauguration of President Hamid Karzai. Salim told Commander Kaufman he should not hesitate to turn to the MFA should he need any help. First Deputy Minister Amonullo Ashur of the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade was similarly positive. A figure out of Soviet Central Casting, the Deputy Minister at one point turned to an Obi Zulol representative who was sitting in on the meeting and said, "are you making this happen?"

COMMENT: TAJIK GOVERNMENT HAS MET ENEMY, AND IT MIGHT BE IT

18. (SBU) There are a number of hurdles to sourcing goods in

Tajikistan: The country has almost no industry and an underdeveloped agricultural sector; it faces severe, factory-crippling power shortages during winter; it is 2,000 miles away from the nearest port; it has a Soviet-era quality control system (where any system at all exists); and it has difficulty feeding its own population, 53% of which live below the poverty level. Nevertheless, Commander Kaufman and his team found several potential suppliers that might meet military needs and standards. The hope on both the Tajik and the U.S. side is that demand for these goods will not only provide much needed revenue in Tajikistan, but will help spur development and goodwill here. Team members were clear to company representatives and government officials alike that certifying and contracting for Tajik goods was a long and difficult road. Another potential difficulty that was not mentioned, however, might be Tajik bureaucracy. It is important that government officials follow up their encouraging words with encouraging actions -- rather than looking for a way to slow down, or personally profit from, our efforts. End comment.

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